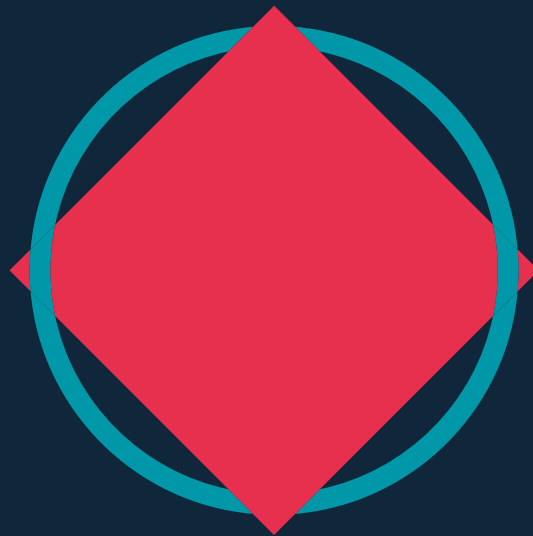


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REGIONAL REPORT

**B2B SELF-REFLECTION:
18 COMPANIES AND
THEIR CHALLENGES
IN CUSTOMER
RELATIONSHIPS**

Madrid, November 6, 2019

INTRODUCTION

There is something changing in the B2B marketplace. In our world of accelerated transformation, not only have end consumers become more sophisticated and unfair, but B2B customers are also going through a process of specialization and demand. This has been forcing the companies they work with to necessarily modify their strategies.

In accordance with a recent analysis carried out by [Accenture](#), 80 percent of B2B companies are at risk of losing revenue due to their strategies and the implementation of customer experience as a key component of their work. In this report, we will present business opinions concerning B2B challenges, as based on responses gathered from senior marketing and customer communication executives from leading companies in Spain, Portugal and Latin America. Creating the best experiences, the role talent plays in building trust, the slow progress of digital transformation regarding customer acquisition and relationship-building are just some of the key points explained below.

DIFFERENTIATION THROUGH BONDS AND EXPERIENCES

Standing out from the crowd is the key to edging out the competition. At either the B2C or B2B level, companies must concentrate on meeting customer needs, and they compete fiercely to stand out.

One way to achieve this goal is through developing a Unique Selling Proposition (USP), meaning the unique benefit a company, service, product or brand provides, also helping it stand out from the competition. What makes the service or product offered unique and special? What makes them different?

The B2B companies consulted agree that offering the best experiences and developing emotional bonds is a key element that helps their brands to build brand awareness and communicate their value proposition as best as possible. "At present, when we talk about concepts such as H2H (Human to Human) or experience as a key component of marketing, brand has become a key asset in both B2B and B2C," explained Juan Noriega del

Aguila Figallo, Corporate Marketing manager at 3M Andean Region, Peru. "Our customers, instead of choosing the product or service with the best features, choose those brands that offer the best experiences and build emotional bonds with them."

"Concrete action in the digital environment, active participation in thought leadership and the use of digital tools to attract new customers are the most important challenges B2B companies"

On the other hand, Cristina Serrano, Corporate Affairs manager at Mallplaza, claims differentiation lies in finding the perfect way to meet customer needs. "The issue is how to get that 1 + 1 to equal 2, and communications can be enhanced to solve customer concerns," she said. "If one really explains their values and stands out from the crowd, alliances concerning what we do will be much more powerful. For example, how other individuals—in this case, operating partners—talk about synergies to make the end customer experience more emblematic." Patricia Acioli, Executive Manager of Corporate Relations in Scannia Brazil, reaffirms this idea and adds that the relationship of talent with the customer relationship strategy is "enormous", because in addition to being in charge of creating brand identity, they "build 'knowledge'".

Regarding the differences between B2B and B2C in terms of brand management, Maria Antonia Saldanha, Brand and Communications director at SIBS in Portugal, claims end consumers have



researched extremely technical knowledge and are well aware of the products they want. “Nowadays, the average user looks up more information and makes a lot of comparisons,” she explained. “We cannot simply say our products are good for health; we need to communicate this idea with objective information. We must always communicate more information, not just for the purpose behind consuming a particular product.”

Roberto Rodriguez, Communications manager at Marsh Mexico, believes the B2B and B2C markets are totally different. “The public or general consumer population may see B2B brands as low-profile,” he stated. “However, they are an important factor for the main decisionmakers in companies, and those are the people to whom their key messages are mainly addressed.”

Some respondents state that they recently completed brand interventions, which have mainly focused on keeping up to date with the constant evolution in their respective markets. In this respect, Juan Diego Diaz, Marketing On-shore director at Siemens Gamesa in Spain, says that, for him, “placing ‘Siemens’ in front of ‘Gamesa’ creates a very important advantage. Now that we are Siemens Gamesa, brand perception becomes more important, because it has improved customer attraction.”

It is important to point out that differentiation also becomes an internal driver as well, often leading to good, tangible and specific results in terms of employee communications. First, the company must do the work within the brand itself. Then,

the lessons learned can be applied to external communications through a digital marketing strategy, a process that involves considerable brand intervention.

TALENT AS THE KEY TO CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

Human talent management has evolved over time, and in recent years, it has acquired greater recognition and importance, since it has proven to be a key element in B2B communications. With this in mind, 3M in Peru believes “the role of talent is essential, since the collaborators are those who share the value proposition with customers across all points of contact, from the commercial area—which is clearly more visible—to the support areas as well. In one way or another, everyone is responsible for making each customer’s experience with the brand memorable.” Patricia Acioli, Executive Manager of Corporate Relations in Scania Brazil, reaffirms this idea and adds that the relationship of talent with the customer relationship strategy is “enormous”, because in addition to being in charge of creating brand identity, they “build ‘knowledge’”.

Business success lies in the hands of those who run it every day. It is found in values such as transparency, professionalism and integrity, which a company can use to strengthen its customer relationships. Ines Veloso, Marketing director at Randstad Portugal, claims that “talent is the backbone of both the company’s strategy and the

commercial strategy.”

According to IBM in Peru, “the approach channel to customers and prospects is the sales force. This channel must be fully trained in two areas—hard skills and soft skills—as well as in new channels, such as social selling, which has become the primary channel to engage customers.” The importance given to talent as a sales tool means that some companies, such as Spanish company Cuatrecasas, individuals are taught about personal branding from the beginning in an effort to give them the tools they will need to make themselves known. Employees must learn to improve their skills and interact both on- and offline. Laura Canudas from Cuatrecasas shares with us that they have had a school of law for several years. There, they teach all types of skills and topics concerning personal branding, networking, pitching, public speaking and time management, among others, to improve employee performance. “By offering all this training, we try to compensate for any shortcomings an employee may have after finishing their course of study, whether in soft skills or technical capabilities.”

Offerings such as these courses are how companies keep their younger employees interested. New generations do not feel as loyal to a company as do older employees, who may have been working for the business for 20 years—or longer. Young people do not stay in just one company, and, when they decide to leave, either for travel or study, they simply do it.

Jose Quiros, general manager at Compañía de Soterramiento de Cables (CSC) in Panama, seeks to break this paradigm, which states that people no longer want to work in a company for 20 years, but for a maximum of 12 months. “To what extent can they be advocates of that?” he asks. “Well, I believe they will be advocates of their own principles and values, and not necessarily of the company. As long as the company vision, mission and values are aligned with the individual’s mission and vision, engagement will exist.”

As Diana Osorio, Communications and Social Responsibility director at SAP, North Latin America Region, says, “A company’s best asset is its employees. We can have the best product, best

solution, best service, but if your employees do not embody your brand, you will have a lot to lose, because they will not know how to convey your value proposition.”

THE CHALLENGE OF CUSTOMER ACQUISITION, STILL FAR FROM DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

One of the most relevant recent phenomena in the commercial relations field has been the appearance of digital technology, which has been transforming this area. This change is felt more clearly in B2C companies, leading to major developments and improving customer relationships. However, this transformation has also reached B2B companies, making them think about the next steps they must take to anticipate new customer and market demands.

Many of the communication challenges B2C companies have faced in recent years, such as branding and marketing, directly connect with B2B customers as well. In this respect, both share very similar challenges. This leads to the following questions: What is happening in these companies, in light of this new scenario? And how are companies that sell products or services to other companies (rather than to end consumers) facing this reality?

First, it is clear that all companies are aware of the changes the digital environment has caused within their businesses regarding the engagement process. From health and industry to banking and finance, respondents from all sectors agree that digital technology directly affects customer acquisition. To deal with this situation, many of the companies consulted have introduced tools such as sales force, data intelligence centers and development to improve their operations. Social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Pinterest, among others) have also become, in many cases, frequently used tools to contact new talent and promote company offerings. This confirms these platforms’ value, as they are so commonly used in business development.

However, even though it may seem as though

the initiatives that drive new customer acquisition align with B2C companies' vision, countries such as Colombia and Mexico report more traditional dynamics, where face-to-face relationships still prevail. Gilead Mexico's Marketing Manager Liliana Escalona insists digitalization has not affected their customer acquisition process because, as part of the pharmaceutical industry, the company must follow government communications regulations, which are very strict in Mexico.

Paradoxically, tech companies have the most gaps in this regard, and simultaneously (but unsurprisingly), sectors such as banking already know "global digital transformation is an issue that is here to stay." Therefore, they are developing more consistent practices to transform the

"Global digital transformation is an issue that is here to stay"

organizational culture. As Produbanco in Ecuador states, "Education in the use of new channels, products and services, many of which are 100% digital, including opening accounts from smart phones, green accounts and digital signatures to facilitate the entire operation," is part of their ongoing work.

On the other hand, most B2Bs consulted point to the importance of positioning themselves as thought leaders in the conversation areas most relevant to their businesses, allowing them to become sector references and opinion leaders—as well as giving them a greater market advantage through their positioning. In that respect, Roberto Rodriguez, Communications manager at Marsh Mexico, claims that "consulting experience is our main differentiator... Our consultants are responsible for not only offering our customers the best solutions, but also guiding the industry toward the future."

The Edelman-LinkedIn study "Thought Leadership Impact 2019" is about how B2B companies know thought leadership matters. When done well, it can allow access to specialized expertise, strengthen business reputation and spark meaningful conversations that lead to real business results.

This highlights the importance of participating in spaces where a company's specialized voice can be heard, aiding its strategic positioning in its sector. Juan Diego Diaz from Siemens Gamesa in Spain states that "the company understands that positioning certain messages in particular forums is of vital importance... since these are the communication channels for the messages we want to convey."

Implementing participation strategies, platforms and tools in spaces where the company's expertise can be applied becomes a must with a view to projecting company image. Brands, such as IBM in Peru, explain how training of spokespeople for particular issues that go to the media is an important pillar for the company. In their case, for example, they have specific Artificial Intelligence spokespeople who not only drive visibility, but can also help position themselves and the company as leaders in the country's technological field.

In contrast, and even though there is clear awareness of the importance of digital technology, many B2B companies continue to rely primarily upon traditional methods as their main engagement strategy. With the exception, perhaps, of banking (which leads many countries in incorporating new platforms, applications and technologies into its operations), most sectors place this responsibility on their sales forces or telemarketing or experience centers. In Argentina, for instance, insurance company Zurich's Marketing manager Ezequiel Salamanca noted how the "traditional method of intermediaries remains the main source of customer acquisition. Although digital media as a channel has grown a lot lately, the market still needs to mature a little more before this channel takes a greater role."

This may be a result of not only the nature of the business, but also the particular market conditions in each country. In any case, it is clear that, in the wake of the disruption caused by digital technology, B2B companies will eventually have to develop strategies to enter markets and, first and foremost, effectively anticipate this new market logic. As such, concrete action in the digital environment, active participation in thought leadership and the use of digital tools to attract new customers are perhaps the most important challenges B2B companies will face in the coming years.

BUILDING CUSTOMER TRUST

Customer retention is a crucial challenge in marketing and B2B communications, and to do it, one of the key words is “trust.” This is an indispensable element to consolidating and maintaining relationships with long-term customer partners. A thought-provoking definition concerning these bonds comes from Cristina Serrano, Corporate Affairs manager at Mallplaza in Colombia: “When our corporate clients’ business hurts to us too, that is when we really legitimize the word ‘ally.’” In addition, Laura Canudas, Marketing and Customer Development director at Cuatrecasas, describes the ideal relationship between a supplier and its B2B customer: “It is putting yourself in the customer’s shoes. This is about a partnership, not case-by-case work. It is about us assuming their burdens and their problems, helping customers be calm.”

Building this trusting relationship of allies and partners is based on three pillars: High-level service, personal relationships with customers and adding value beyond what is strictly agreed on.

Regarding service excellence, “we have to ensure technology implementation projects are successful to ensure customer loyalty, since the relationship begins during the work and in after-sales support,” claims Karen Matallana, Communications and Marketing manager at IBM in Peru. Maria Antonia Saldanha, Brand and Communication director at SIBS, highlights this with a story on the daily reality in her payment processing work: “Trust is when the person who has made a deposit into your account knows the money will be there and has no doubts about it.” Furthermore, Tiago Caravana, Marketing director at CVRA in Portugal, adds the variables of more qualitative and personal interaction, saying “Service excellence comes from the efficiency, diplomacy and kindness shown when contacting customers.”

That diplomacy and kindness are inextricably linked to the personal relationship established, not only with another company, but with the people who hire us and whom we serve. “B2B necessarily implies a relationship of trust while interacting with people, so it also has an emotional component,” explains the vice president of Planning and Development for Produbanco

in Ecuador. “What we do is try to understand and develop those relationships, not thinking only of the company as an entity per se, but understanding and knowing all the people who are part of that company, who make the decisions and who then refer us.”

In this respect, in addition to empathy, support and anticipating customer needs are fundamentally valuable. “Although the relationship begins with a specific need, over time we advise and accompany company growth, and that deepens this bond,” adds Produbanco’s vice president of Planning and Development. Furthermore, to anticipate well, it is essential to find “the crossroads” of supplier technical expertise and their customer and market knowledge (due to their closeness). “When you align these three things, that’s when you can best build customer loyalty, because you give them what they need,” states Laura Canudas,

“B2B companies will have to develop strategies to enter markets and anticipate this new market logic”

Marketing and Customer Development director at Cuatrecasas. “Continuous feedback is very important, as is knowing customer priorities and how they change over time and anticipating their requirements, always looking for how you can make their lives better,” adds Juan Noriega del Aguila Figallo, Corporate Marketing manager at 3M, Andean Region in Peru.

As for the third pillar (giving more than what you are hired for), a strategy that works for EY in Spain concerns thought leadership. “We provide our customers with exclusive, valuable information to keep them up-to-date with the latest developments relevant to their day-to-day activities,” explains Elena Merino Macho, Associate Brand and Marketing director at EY Spain. “We also give them access to a total of

more than 200 annual events, whose attendance totals more than 20,000 people who we can interact with throughout the year.” This type of approach leads to what Ines Veloso, Marketing director at Randstad Portugal, defines as “the ability to maintain a relevant conversation with the customer without being intrusive.”

“in addition to empathy, support and anticipating customer needs are fundamentally valuable”

All this work leads to something that may sound unusual in a B2B relationship: Establishing an emotional bond with the customer. “This is a business of people; we do not sell products,” states , states Jose Luis Risco Rojas, Human

Resources director at EY Spain. “Customers expect us to work with our hearts.”

“We are emotional thinking beings,” adds Gustavo Orfano, Commercial manager at Iké Asistencia Argentina. This helps explain why, even in B2B decisions, emotions play a major role—along with rationality, of course. In addition to reliability and closeness, memorable experiences are also important (CVRA, for example, takes advantage of wine tourism and tastings), as is the power and reputation of recognized brands (IBM in Peru, for example).

Even with traditionally “hard” clients, such as purchasing areas, there is the space and need to go beyond the economic and technical requirements. “It is very important to raise awareness of the services we offer these administrative areas, showing the impact of decisions made considering only economic factors,” explains Adriana Vargas, Marketing manager at LHH-DBM.

Given the diversity of views, people and customer contact areas, as well as the need to create a positive experience and learn throughout prospecting, sales, delivery and post-sales processes, it becomes increasingly important to develop customer experience strategies. The majority of executives interviewed agree on this need, and some are already taking the first



problem...’ and that is amazing, because it allows us to redirect our strategy completely,” says Diaz.



steps in that direction. “It is about setting up an ideal customer relations model, looking at the gaps and correcting and improving processes,” explains Elena Merino Macho, associate Brand and Marketing director at EY Spain. Juan Noriega del Aguila Figallo, Corporate Marketing manager at 3M, Andean Region in Peru, says “The key is to understand that the customer must always be the focus, and that their experience must be flawless across both physical and digital media, as well as in all customer points of contact with the brand.”

While customer experience projects are being launched, what all respondents agree on is that feedback information should be collected to help decide how the relationship plan will be adjusted. There is at least one survey per year, but there is also room for face-to-face feedback. IBM Peru, for instance, relies on its sales force, which is on the front line with the customer. In addition, Juan Diego Diaz, On-shore Marketing director at Siemens Gamesa, explains that the company holds face-to-face interviews with key customers, held by the marketing area to ensure the objectivity. “It is like a romantic relationship that may be burning out, and these interviews are like going to a therapist so you can let go of everything you have inside and say, ‘Look, this is happening to me, I have this

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT WHEN DECIDING TO PURCHASE A SERVICE PROVIDED BY A B2B COMPANY?



29,41 %
Expertise

25,29 %
Referral

23,52 %
Brand Reputation

21,76 %
Price

WHICH OF THESE TECHNOLOGIES DO YOU THINK WILL TRANSFORM B2B BUSINESS MOST IN THE COMING YEARS?



35,76 %
Big Data

21,85 %
Artificial intelligence

21,19 %
Virtual reality

19,86%
Blockchain

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES B2B BUSINESSES FACE TODAY?



33,90 %
Customer Experience

26,43 %
Employee Advocacy

21,26 %
Thought Leadership

18,39 %
Branding

BRANDS AND PEOPLE IN THE REPORT

	Juan Noriega del Aguila Figallo Corporate Marketing - Andean Region at 3M in Perú
	Karen Matallana Communications and Marketing Manager at IBM in Peru
	Adriana Vargas Marketing Manager at LHH-DBM in Peru
	Cristina Serrano Corporate Affairs Manager at Mallplaza in Colombia
	Roberto Rodríguez Communications Manager at MARSH in Mexico
	Liliana Escalona Marketing Manager at Gilead in Mexico
	Maria Antónia Saldanha Global Brand and Corporate Communication Senior Director y Payforward Innovation Program Director at SIBS in Portugal
	Inês Veloso Marketing Director at Randstad in Portugal
	Tiago Caravana Marketing Director at CVRA in Portugal
	Laura Canudas Marketing Director and Business Developer Officer at Cuatrecasas in Spain
	Juan Diego Díaz Marketing On-shore Director at Siemens Gamesa in Spain
	José Luis Risco Rojas Human Resources Director at EY in Spain Elena Merino Macho Brand and Marketing Associate Director at EY in Spain
	José Quirós General Manager at Compañía para el Soterramiento de Cables in Panama
	Diana Osorio Communications and Social responsibility Director of the North Region of Latin America at SAP in Panama
	Planning and Development Vice President at Produbanco in Ecuador
	Ezequiel Salamanco Marketing Manager at Zurich in Argentina
	Gustavo Orfano Business Manager at Iké Asistencia in Argentina
	Patricia Acioli Executive Manager of Corporate Relations in Scania Brazil

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With almost ten years of experience working in the mass consumption sector, she currently oversees projects such as the execution of Backus’ corporate narrative strategy from her position in LLYC Peru’s Consumer Engagement area. This includes initiatives such as ‘Stories & Beers,’ which won a Gold at the 2018 Sabre Awards. She also leads Alicorp’s brand communications and a strategy project for Peruvian beauty multinational and market leader Yanbal. She holds a master’s in Public Relations and Communication Bureaus from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain) and in Communications from the University of Lima.



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She has worked in several different business sectors including banking, distribution, the auto industry, retail, telecommunications, transport and services. She has over 15 years’ professional experience managing communication for brands within multinational advertising firms like Grey, Leo Burnett, Lintas and Young & Rubicam. She also set up a project to create local content: Lisbon South Bay, a blog dedicated to life on the south bank of the Tagus River. Marlene holds a degree in Public Relations and Advertising from the Instituto Superior Novas Profissões and a Postgraduate in Marketing and International Business from INDEG-ISCTE.

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